

Witness Testimony: Salai Bawi Lian

Chin Human Rights Organization Washington DC-December 3, 2007 Thank you. Thank you very much Mr. Chairman and the honorable commission. A few months ago, the world witnessed how the Burmese military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) ruthlessly persecuted Buddhist monks in the street of Rangoon. The whole world was shocked. In fact, the SPDC have been systematically persecuting religious minority groups such as Chin Christians for decades. I am honored to be invited to this important hearing to tell how the military junta in Burma has systematically persecuted Chin Christians who inhabit Burma's western territory of Chin State or Chinland. My name is Salai Bawi Lian from Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO). I am an ethnic Chin from Burma. When I and my colleagues founded Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), our intention was to document all incidents of human rights abuses against Chin people without focusing on a single issue. However, as time went on, it was quickly obvious that the issue of religious persecution was a matter of great concern to us. At least one piece of information in the reports that we gathered for our bimonthly newsletter, Rhododendron News, has had to do religious persecution against Chin Christians. The CHRO eventually published a book "Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christian in Burma" in 2005 that can be downloaded from CHRO website at www.chro.org. When I look back the record of CHRO documentation for the past 12 years, its begin with the news about 5 Chin Christian children lured and forced to become young Buddhist monks and nuns in 1995 and the last information report we received as recently as last month November 2007 that Chin Christian students in one particular town of Chin state are regularly forced to observe Buddhist merit making in the middle of the week that the entire school have to be closed on official school day. Then the entire school has to make up their missing day on Saturday. The SPDC and successive Burmese military regime have been systematically persecuting Chin Christians for decades that the SPDC; Prohibit construction of Churches, Destroyed Crosses and Replaced With Pagodas or Statue of Buddhist Monk After 1990s the Chins never get permit to construct Churches Destroyed most Crossed planted in towns and replaced with Buddhist pagodas or Buddhist monk statue The order to destroy cross usually come from the highest military rank in the region The largest Cross remaining, 50 foot tall, in Chin State was destroyed in 2005 with direct order from the highest military commander in Chin State. Censor Christian Literature and Publication Since 1962 the Chin Christians never get permission to print the Holy Bible in their own language in Burma In the year 2000 the CHRO received a report that 16,000 Bibles was confiscated by the SPDC in the India-Burma border town of Tamu. The Chins are prohibited to learn their own language in their own homeland. Target Clergy Christian pastors and ministers are highly respected among the Chin people They are highly respected as intermediaries between God and the congregations. The dignitary position of pastors and ministers made jealousy of the military regime that they are the first targets in the regime's campaign against Chin Christians Rev. Zaangkholet and three of the village elders were brutally killed. Rev. Luai Thang was humiliated and brutally killed. Several other pastors and minister have been humiliated and arrested. Restrict on Freedom of Assembly and Worship All Christians gathering and conference including religious festival require prior authorization by the Military regime. The regime usually impose many restrictions. In some occasion the sermon had to be approved by the authority. Discriminate Based on Ethnicity and Religion Christians with non-Burman ethnic background can not be promoted in high ranking government official. In the Army Chin Christian can not be promoted beyond Major rank unless they converted to Buddhism. There are 3 categories (A, B, and C) designated for those who can not be promoted in the rank. A stands for AIDS symptom, B stands for Hepatitis B and C stands for Christians. Selective Forced Labor Forced labor in a widespread practice in Burma. However, forced labor is specifically directed against Chin Christians in order to coerce them into converting to Buddhism. Those who converts to Buddhism are exempted from forced labor while Christians are forced to work on Sundays. State Sponsor Expansion of Buddhism Since early 1990s the Burmese military regime created Hill Region Buddhist Mission and send many Buddhist monks to Chin state. Chin Christians are forced to contribute labor, money for construction of Buddhist monasteries and Pagodas, and forced to listen the Buddhist monk sermons. Many Chin Christians children have been lured to provide education in a bigger town. However Children are later found to be in Buddhist monasteries with their head shaven to become novice Buddhist monks. A People and Culture at Stake Due to militarization and human rights violations committed by the Burmese military regime against Chin Christians, many can not longer survive. There are 60 thousands Chin refugees living in India. There are between 25 thousands Chin refugees living in Malaysia The Chin people are facing untold poverty and humanitarian crisis Recommendation Needed national reconciliation through dialogue Needed to implement Broad Based Constitutional Review Commission proposed by UN Special Envoy Mr. Ibrahim Gambari Needed to implement Broad Based Poverty Alleviation Commission Thank you very much. Salai Bawi Lian Mang
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